



NEWS RELEASE

HOWARD COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF POLICE OFFICE OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS

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HCPD recruit class partners with Autism Society to enhance training and fundraising

Howard County police recruits will be learning more than ever about autism, with enhanced training from the Howard County Autism Society (HCAS) and a new service project to engage with and fundraise for the organization.

Last year, Police Chief Gary Gardner tasked each academy class to identify and partner with a local organization to increase community policing efforts. Academy Class 40 selected HCAS, which has had a long-standing relationship with law enforcement. Last year's academy class raised more than \$9,000 for Grassroots Crisis Intervention Center with its project, Sleep Out to End Homelessness. They served meals and slept outside at a local shelter overnight to support the effort.

"These projects not only assist local nonprofits, but as importantly, they personally impact our newest officers and better prepare them for interactions in the community," said Chief Gardner.

The HCAS service project will offer recruits first-hand experience with autism as they interact with children, adults, and families affected by the developmental disorder.

In 2015, the state of Maryland mandated that all entry-level police recruits receive training on intellectual disabilities. Academy Class 40 will be the second recruit class to receive the specialized instruction, which includes scenario-based trainings delivered by teams from the Autism Society and law enforcement. This training relationship prompted the recruits to choose HCAS as their service project.

Recruits will volunteer at several social events hosted by HCAS to engage with individuals and families with autism in positive and non-threatening environments. The events will include an HCAS Winter Pool Party on Jan. 17 at Lifetime Fitness in Columbia and two open gym nights at the Columbia Gym, to be held in February and March. The recruits also are actively raising funds and seeking donations for a silent auction to be held at the HCAS 11th Annual Pieces of the Puzzle Gala, April 30.

In recent years, the police department has partnered with HCAS on several initiatives to address autism and safety, including the 911 Call Center's "Address Flagging" program. The program gives families who have loved ones with autism an option to voluntarily "flag" their addresses in the 911 system, alerting first responders that an individual with autism resides in the home and may be nonverbal, oversensitive to loud noises or sirens, prone to elope or other note-worthy behavior.

"The partnership with the police department has proven to be invaluable to our families," said HCAS President Theresa Ballinger. "There's peace of mind in knowing that responding officers will have a basic understanding of autism and how it may affect someone in an emergency situation."

Donations of funds or items for the silent auction may be made online at www.howard-autism.org, with "HCPD" noted in the "Organization" field. Or checks may be payable to Howard County Autism Society, 10280 Old Columbia Road, Suite 215, Columbia, Md., 21046, noting "HCPD" on the check. For more information about the HCAS or how to donate, email info@howard-autism.org. The HCAS is a 501(c)3 tax-exempt organization and donations are tax deductible.

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